

HOW BILL NYE STARTED

HIS FIRST FUNNY LETTER ONE OF RESIGNATION.

Might Have to Keep a Piano on File—
Had an Insatiable Appetite for
Clothes.

In 1881 Bill Nye was a briefless lawyer, dabbling in country newspaper work at Laramie, Wyo. The thing which drew him out of his obscurity and eventually made him a famous humorist with a good-sized fortune was the letter in which he resigned his place as United States commissioner. That letter, which was reprinted everywhere, marked the advent of a new comic writer and the turn of the tide in the affairs of Edgar Wilson Nye. Here is the famous epistle:

To the Department of Justice, Washington, D. C.: Several months ago I resigned as United States commissioner of this judicial district. The government did not accept my resignation, thus tacitly asserting that there was no one who was considered competent to take my place in holding up this corner of the national fabric.

I now once more resign. I do not do so because I am displeased with the government, or because I am displeased with public life. There is no reason why the government and myself should not continue to be friends, but under the new regime for United States commissioners of district courts I am compelled to retire from the official capacity which I have so long filled with so much skill and credit, both to my self and the United States.

The Department of Justice now requires me to furnish a detailed statement each month of all the business done by the commissioner, with his official certificate attached. I am also required to keep a large volume in my office as a record of the United States cases examined by me. I am to do this at my own expense, in order that the honor and high moral tone of the nation may remain unsmirched.

All these requirements I could, of course, comply with, but I am cursed with the horrible apprehension that in the future I shall be required to do more of this till the expense will be more than I can meet. I could now, of course, get little chores to do around town, enough for necessary funds to buy the records, etc., but before another year the government may require me to buy a marble-top center table, and two or three paintings by the old masters, in order to give the popular amount of terror to the United States criminals. This would compel me to go without a new overcoat and underclothes, of which I am sadly in need. I had hoped that with the financial prosperity of the past year there would be one case, at least, for examination, for which I could realize \$6 or \$7, and which would ease this branch of the Department of Justice temporarily, but I have been disappointed all the way through. I could squeeze along without the overcoat in order to get the required record this winter, but the underclothes I feel as if I ought to have.

I might die suddenly while on the bench and it would sound harshly if the telegraphic dispatch were to state that when the post mortem was held the jury found a verdict that the United States commissioner had died from exposure and a temporary stagnation of underclothes.

Our winters here are quite severe, and if the Department of Justice should some day require me in my official capacity to buy an upright piano and keep it on file, I would have to clothe myself in my unswerving integrity and a pair of gold-bowed eyeglasses.

There is no question about the air of cheerfulness that a piano would give to my office, especially if some lady were to be tried on some charge or another, for she could bang an overture out of the instrument while waiting for the United States attorney to come, and it would help him kill time, but the court would either have to lock itself in an adjoining closet till the defendant had gone, or



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